

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

A ROUTING CONTROL METHOD AND APPARATUS
THEREOF IN A MIXED ENVIRONMENT OF A HIERARCHIAL
NETWORK AND A NON-HIERARCHIAL NETWORK

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a routing control method and an apparatus thereof in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network, and especially relates to the routing control method and the apparatus thereof in the mixed environment of a hierarchy compliant IP (Internet Protocol) and a hierarchy-non-compliant IP.

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2. Description of the Related Art

With the rapid proliferation of the Internet and Intranets into offices and campuses, the networks have evolved from conventional experiments to networks that play a central role in business. Further, the transmission speed of physical media, such as Ethernet, has risen from 10Mbps, to 100Mbps, and on to 1Gbps. In order to service the high transmission speed, fast routing search inside a router is required. This requirement has led to the development of a hierachial network that requires less time for routing search by simplifying network composition, and IPv6 (Internet Protocol version 6) as a hierarchy compliant IP technology to realize the hierachial network.

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However, the main thrust of networks at present is using IPv4 (Internet Protocol version 4) that is not compliant with hierarchy, resulting in a mixture of the non-hierachial network and the hierachial network in this transition period to the hierachial network.

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The IPv4, an IP widely used by the Internet at present, provides a 32-bit address,

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every 8 bits of which is delimited by a dot. The address, having a network block that identifies a network to which the node belongs, and a host block that identifies each node within the network, is
5 assigned to each node. An IP address is suffixed by a slash and a number indicating how many bits the network block has.

For example, for an address 133.160.115.5/24, the first 24 bits (133,160,115) of
10 the 133.160.115.5 represent the network block and 5 represents the host block. Moreover, if 0 is placed in the host block, the IP address indicates a network itself. That is, a network of 133.160.115 is indicated by 133.160.115.0/24.

15 The routers are installed on boundaries of networks to perform routing selection for a packet, and routing information required therefor is periodically exchanged among the routers. Exchange of the routing information is shown in Fig. 2.
20 Routing information of the address 133.160.115.0/24 is exchanged from a router A to a router B, thereby, the router B recognizes that the address 133.160.115.0/24 exists beyond an address 150.123.212.0/24 (routing information to the router
25 A).

Similarly, the router A recognizes that an address 133.160.116.0/24 exists beyond the address 150.123.212.0/24, using routing information from the router B. The same applies to exchanges between a
30 router C and the routers A and B. Each router is provided with the routing information in a table format, and updates it at the next routing exchange.

Fig. 3 shows an example of a packet relay in a network that has exchanged the routing information as shown in Fig. 2.

- 35 1. An IP packet P1 transmitted to a host b from a host a is transmitted to the router A, which

is a router of the address 133.160.115.0/24.

2. The router A searches for the network block of the address (133.160.116.0/24) through the entirety of its routing information table.

5 3. The router A determines that the router B is where the packet should be sent as a result of the search, and transmits the packet P1 to the router B.

10 4. The router B, upon receiving the packet P1, determines from the network block of the packet P1 that the packet is for its subordinate network, subsequently looks at the host block of the packet P1, and transmits the packet P1 to the host b.

15 Here, a point to be observed is that a routing search in each of the above clauses 2. and 4. was performed for the whole of the network block. This is because a decision as to which, router B or router C, the router A shall transmit to cannot be made by searching only part of the network block. In 20 other words, the network is not structured in hierarchies based on IP addresses.

25 In a network that has evolved to be structured in hierarchies, it is not necessary to perform a routing search of an IP address including all the network blocks. Rather, it is performed in reference to a hierarchy. For example, Fig. 4 shows a hierachial network based on a structure of IP addresses. When a host A on an address α .A.a.0/24 transmits a packet to a host B on an address 30 β .B.a.0/24 in this network, routing selection can be performed by looking at only β in the address of the host B in a subordinate network of an address α .0.0.0/8. Further, a routing selection for the host B can start after the traffic enters under an 35 address β .0.0.0/8. Namely, it is not always necessary to perform the routing selection in reference to the entire network block.

As a means to realize the hierachial network as above, a new IP protocol IPv6 is being studied and developed by a standardization organization, IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force) which decides on communication standards about IP. An example of an address format of IPv6 is shown in Fig. 5. As for IPv6, the address is 128 bit long, wherein TLAID (Top Level Aggregation Identifier) indicates the highest level in the hierarchy, and NLAID (Next Level Aggregation Identifier) and SLAID (Site Level Aggregation Identifier) are assigned to subordinate networks in this sequence by a network manager when a network is structured. An interface ID is assigned to each interface of each terminal, and generally a lower layer address, such as a MAC address, is included.

Fig. 6 shows an example of use of an IPv6 address format. As the drawing shows, TLA, NLA and SLA are layered in this order, and a MAC address (A) of a node Z is used as its interface ID. Further, Fig. 7 shows an example of the structure of a hierachial network which uses IPv6. As shown in the drawing, TLA, NLA, and SLA structure the network with hierarchy, enabling the hierarchical routing search mentioned above.

Because of a high-speed routing search ability, the IPv6 will be introduced in the Internet from backbone to edge. However, in an introductory process, a mixed environment with IPv4 will be inevitable. For this reason, IETF has separately prescribed an address format that realizes mapping of IPv4 addresses onto IPv6 addresses as shown in Fig. 8. Hereinafter, this address format is called an IPv4 compatible IPv6 address format.

Although the IPv4 compatible IPv6 address format is a packet format to realize transmission and relay of a packet between IPv6 and IPv4 networks,

the hierachial structure as shown in Fig. 5 is not employed, but only a structure incorporating an IPv4 address in the address field of IPv6. For this reason, in a mixed environment with an IPv4 network,
5 non-hierarchy-routing control is also required in the IPv6 network.

Expectation of the realization of fast routing control by a hierarchical network structure is growing, driven by the rapid expansion of the
10 Internet/Intranets. As seen above, while a study and development of IPv6 have been undertaken, a problem has been that the high-speed routing control feature of IPv6 by the hierachic structure could not be adapted in a mixed environment of the IPv4 network
15 and the IPv6 network.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally aims at providing a routing control method and an apparatus therefor in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network, wherein a high-speed routing search is attained within the hierachial network when performing routing control to a non-hierachial network in the mixed
20 environment of the hierachial network and the non-hierachial network.
25

In order to attain this object, the present invention provides the routing control method in the mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network by structuring such that

30 a virtual hierarchy number equivalent to a hierarchy number of the hierachial network is assigned to the non-hierachial network,
35 when a packet is to be relayed between non-hierachial networks through a hierachial network, a router located at an entrance from a

first non-hierarchial network to the hierarchial network assigns a virtual hierarchy number to the packet to be relayed,

within the hierarchial network,

5 hierarchical routing control is performed on the virtual hierarchy number, and

a router located at an exit from the hierarchial network to a second non-hierarchial network removes the virtual hierarchy number from

10 the packet to be relayed.

According to the routing control method in the mixed environment of the hierarchial network and the non-hierarchial network such as above, the non-hierarchial network, having the hierarchial network

15 as a backbone, can operate as usual without being aware of the hierarchial network in the backbone, yet a high-speed routing search via a hierarchial routing table can be realized within the hierarchial network for routing to a non-hierarchial network.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become still clearer by reading the following detailed explanation,

25 referring to an attached drawing.

Fig. 1 is a drawing showing a structure of an IP address of IPv4.

Fig. 2 is a drawing showing an exchange of routing information.

30 Fig. 3 is a drawing showing an example of a packet relay in a network for which routing information shown in Fig. 2 has been exchanged.

Fig. 4 is a drawing showing a hierarchial network based on structure of an IP address.

35 Fig. 5 is a drawing showing an example of an address format of IPv6.

Fig. 6 is a drawing showing an example of

use of an IPv6 address format.

Fig. 7 is a drawing showing an example of a structure of the hierachial network that uses IPv6.

5 Fig. 8 is a drawing showing an address format that maps an IPv4 address to an IPv6 address.

Fig. 9 is a network block diagram of an embodiment of a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network, to which the
10 present invention is applied.

Fig. 10 is a drawing showing the structures of an IPv6 network address, a hierarchy compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 network address, and an IPv6 host address.

15 Fig. 11 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the present invention, showing a virtual hierarchy compliant router as a routing control apparatus in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network.

20 Fig. 12 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a packet transceiver means 10.

Fig. 13 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a packet relay processing means 20.

25 Fig. 14 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a virtual hierarchy management means 30.

Fig. 15 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a routing information receiving means 40.

30 Fig. 16 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a routing information transmitting means 50.

Fig. 17 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a hierachial routing table holding means 60.

35 Fig. 18 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a conventional routing table holding

means 70.

Fig. 19 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of routing information reception from an IPv4 network.

5 Fig. 20 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of routing information reception from an IPv6 network.

10 Fig. 21 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of routing information transmission to an IPv6 network.

15 Fig. 22 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of routing information transmission to an IPv4 network.

Fig. 23 is a flowchart of an embodiment of 15 a process of packet relay from an IPv4 network to an IPv6 network.

Fig. 24 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of packet relay from an IPv6 network to an IPv4 network.

20 Fig. 25 is a flowchart of an embodiment of a process of packet relay from an IPv6 network to an IPv6 network.

25 Fig. 26 is a drawing for explaining routing information exchange in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network, to which the present invention is applied.

Fig. 27 shows a hierachial routing table and a conventional routing table of a router B.

30 Fig. 28 shows a hierachial routing table and a conventional routing table of a router C.

Fig. 29 shows a hierachial routing table and a conventional routing table of a router D.

35 Fig. 30 is a drawing for explaining a packet relay in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network, to which the present invention is applied.

Fig. 31 shows a hierachial routing table

and a conventional routing table of the router D.

Fig. 32 shows a hierachial routing table
and a conventional routing table of the router C.

Fig. 33 shows a hierachial routing table
5 and a conventional routing table of the router B.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Hereafter, embodiments of the present
invention will be described with reference to
10 figures.

Fig. 9 shows a network block diagram of an
embodiment of a mixed environment of a hierachial
network and a non-hierachial network, to which the
present invention is applied. In the present
15 invention, an IPv4 network is treated as if it were
a hierachial IPv6 network, wherein a router located
at a boundary of the IPv4 network and the IPv6
network assigns a virtual hierarchy of the IPv6
network to the IPv4 network. A router B assigns
20 SLAID=3 to an IPv4 network on the left-hand side of
the drawing, while a router C assigns SLAID=4 to an
IPv4 network on the right-hand side. These
assignments are performed by a technique, such as
user operation, and this virtual hierarchy realizes
25 the same hierachial routing control as with IPv6
networks.

In addition, a host/router in the IPv4
network will not be aware of the virtual hierarchy,
except for the router B and the router C. However,
30 when the IPv6 network groups routing information,
the IPv4 network cannot transmit routing information
through the IPv6. For example, if routing
information on an address AA.BB.CC.00/24, and an
address AA.BB.DD.00/24 are grouped into SLAID=3, the
35 routing information will not be transmitted to an
address AA.BB.EE.00/24. In a network structured by
only IPv4 networks, automatic grouping of routing

information as above is not performed.

For this reason, two means are used in this embodiment, as follows. In addition, in this embodiment, an IP network is targeted.

5 First, a router in the IPv6 network is provided with two kinds of routing tables, one being a conventional routing table that does not perform grouping of routing by hierarchy, and the other being a hierachial routing table that performs
10 grouping by routing hierarchy. For example, the router in the IPv6 network uses the hierachial routing table when performing a high-speed routing search by hierarchy, and uses the conventional routing table for exchange of routing information
15 when the hierachial routing table does not work due to the grouping of the routing information.

Second, an address format which embeds an IPv4 address into an interface ID of an IPv6 address is specified as an address format that indicates
20 virtual hierarchy information assigned to the IPv4 network and the IPv4 network address, without using a conventional IPv4 compatible IPv6 address. For example, routing information of AA.BB.CC.00 shown in Fig. 9 is handled as "TLAID=α, NLAID=β, SLAID=3, and
25 interface ID=AA.BB.CC.00" in the IPv6 network. Therefore, in the IPv6 network, an IPv6 address shown in Fig. 5 and a virtual IPv6 address that is an IPv4 address to which a virtual hierarchy is assigned are intermingled. Figs. 10 (A), (B), and
30 (C) show structure of an IPv6 network address, a hierarchy compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 network address, and an IPv6 host address, respectively.

Two kinds of addresses above are identified in a procedure that follows. As shown in
35 Fig. 10 (A), when the interface ID is "All 0", it is identified as a network address of IPv6. Moreover, as shown in Fig. 10 (B), when the highest 32 bits of

the interface ID are 0, it is identified as the network address of IPv4 that is made virtually hierachial. Otherwise, it is identified as the IPv6 host address, as shown in Fig. 10 (C).

5 Fig. 11 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a virtual hierarchy compliant router of the embodiment of the present invention, which is a routing control apparatus in the mixed environment of the hierachial network and the non-hierachial
10 network. In addition, the routers A, B, and C shown in Fig. 9 are the virtual hierarchy compliant routers, and a router D is a conventional IPv4 router.

15 The router B as shown in Fig. 11 assigns a virtual hierarchy SLAID=3 to an IPv4 network of AA.BB.CC.00/24 and an IPv4 network of AA.BB.DD.00/24. To an IPv4 network AA.BB.EE.00/24, a virtual hierarchy SLAID=4 is similarly assigned by the router C.

20 The virtual hierarchy compliant router includes packet transceiver means 10, packet relay processing means 20, virtual hierarchy management means 30, routing information receiving means 40, routing information transmitting means 50,
25 hierachial routing table holding means 60, and conventional routing table holding means 70, as shown in Fig. 11.

30 The packet transceiver means 10 is a means for transmitting and receiving an IP packet. Fig. 12 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the packet transceiver means 10, and the packet transceiver means 10 includes a packet receiving unit 11 and a packet transmitting unit 12. The packet receiving unit 11, a unit for receiving an IP packet, passes the received packet to the routing information receiving means 40 with a receiving interface name, if the received packet from a transmission path

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contains routing information, and, otherwise, passes the received packet to the packet relay processing means 20 with the receiving interface name. The packet transmitting unit is a unit for transmitting 5 an IP packet, and transmits a packet passed from the routing information transmitting means 50 or from the packet relay processing means 20 to a transmission path.

The packet relay processing means 20 is a 10 means to perform routing search for relay processing of a packet. Fig. 13 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the packet relay processing means 20, and the packet relay processing means 20 includes a routing search unit 21 and a packet conversion unit 15 22. The routing search unit 21 determines a router or a host to which the packet is to be sent, based on a destination address of a packet which was passed from the packet receiving unit 11 and to be relayed, in a procedure that follows.

20 First, when a packet to be relayed arrives at a router from an IPv4 network, routing search by the conventional routing table holding means 70 is performed.

25 Next, when a packet to be relayed arrives at the router from an IPv6 network, routing search by the hierachial routing table holding means 60 is performed. Further, a result of the routing search and the packet to be relayed are passed to the packet conversion unit 22.

30 The packet conversion unit 22 performs packet conversion in a procedure that follows, provides a next receiving party to the packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10, and passes the packet that has been converted.

35 As for a packet to be relayed from an IPv4 network to an IPv6 network, a format conversion of the addresses of receiving party and sending

party with a virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address is performed, thereby an IPv6 packet is generated out of the IPv4 packet. In addition, in order to obtain a virtual hierarchy number at this time, an inquiry is made to the virtual hierarchy management means 30.

As for a packet to be relayed from the IPv6 network to the IPv4 network, a format conversion of addresses of the sending party and the receiving party is performed with an IPv4 address of the interface ID of the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address, thereby an IPv4 packet is generated out of the IPv6 packet. Further, no conversion shall be performed on packets to be relayed other than packets to be relayed from the IPv4 network to the IPv6 network, and from the IPv6 network to the IPv4 network.

The virtual hierarchy management means 30 is a means to virtually assign an IPv6 hierarchy to the IPv4 network. Fig. 14 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the virtual hierarchy management means 30, which includes a virtual hierarchy assigning unit 31 and a virtual hierarchy memory unit 32. The virtual hierarchy assigning unit 31 assigns virtual hierarchy information to each interface that accommodates an IPv4 network by a user operation and the like, and the virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 stores the information. Further, the hierarchy information for an IPv4 network is written into the hierachial routing table holding means 60. The virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 stores the virtual hierarchy information that has been assigned by the virtual hierarchy assigning unit 31.

The routing information receiving means 40 generates two tables, a conventional routing table and a hierachial routing table, based on the routing information received from an adjacent router.

Fig. 15 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the routing information receiving means 40, which includes a routing information selection unit 41, an IPv6 routing information processing unit 42, and an IPv4 routing information receiving unit 43. The routing information selection unit 41 determines whether a routing information packet received from the packet transceiver unit 10 is a routing information packet received from an IPv6 network or a routing information packet received from an IPv4 network, based on the receiving interface of the routing information packet. In the former case, the packet is passed to the IPv6 routing information receiving unit 42, and in the latter case, it is passed to the IPv4 routing information processing unit 43.

The IPv6 routing information processing unit generates a routing table from the routing information received from the IPv6 network. For example, in Fig. 9, router A receives the routing information from the router B. Here, a routing table of each entry of routing information is generated as follows. As for a routing information entry of an IPv6 network, hierarchy information is collected and a conventional routing table and a hierachial routing table are generated.

As for a routing information entry of an IPv4 network, i.e., a virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address, a hierachial routing table is generated by combining entries based on virtual hierarchy numbers, and a conventional routing table is generated without combining entries. For example, in Fig. 9, when the router A receives routing information about an IPv4 network on the right-hand side from the router B, two entries of address AA.BB.CC.0.0/24, and address AA.BB.DD.00/24 are generated in the conventional routing table of the

router A, and only one entry is generated in the hierachial routing table, grouping them into SLAID=3.

The IPv4 routing information processing
5 unit 43 generates a routing table from routing
information received from the IPv4 network. An
example of this case is shown in Fig. 9, by the
router B receiving routing information from the
router D. Here, the routing table of each entry of
10 routing information is generated as follows. To each
entry of routing information, a virtual hierarchy
number corresponding to an interface from which the
routing information is received is obtained from the
virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 of the virtual
15 hierarchy setting means 30 and a conventional
routing table is generated without grouping by the
hierarchy number.

The routing information transmitting means
50 is a means to transmit routing information to an
20 adjacent router or a host. Fig. 16 is a block
diagram of an embodiment of the routing information
transmitting means 50, which includes a timer unit
51 and a transmitting routing information generating
unit 52. The timer unit 51 supplies a direction to
25 transmit routing information at every fixed time to
the transmitting routing information generating unit
52 with an address of a receiver of the routing
information. The transmitting routing information
generating unit 52, upon receiving the direction
30 from the timer unit 51, generates routing
information from the conventional routing table
holding means 70, and transmits to the address of
the receiver via the packet transceiver unit 10.

The hierachial routing table holding
35 means 60 is a means to hold hierarchy compliant
routing information. Fig. 17 is a block diagram of
an embodiment of the hierachial routing table

holding means 60 which includes a hierachial routing database unit 61. The hierachial routing database unit 61 is a database unit that stores the routing information generated by the IPv4 routing 5 information processing unit 43 and the IPv6 routing information processing unit 42, and searches a next transmitting router or a host, with hierarchy information being a search key.

The conventional routing table holding 10 means 70 is a means to store the routing information referred to when hierachial routing search is not performed. Fig. 18 is a block diagram of an embodiment of the conventional routing table holding means 70 which includes a conventional routing 15 database unit 71. The conventional routing database unit 71 is a database unit that stores the routing information generated in the IPv4 routing information processing unit 43, and searches a next transmitting router or a host, with the destination 20 address being a search key.

Next, a process of routing information from an IPv4 network, performed by the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention, will be described. Fig. 19 is a flowchart of an 25 embodiment of the process of routing information reception from an IPv4 network.

Step S11. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10, which receives a routing information packet, passes the packet and a 30 receiving interface name to the routing information receiving means 40.

Step S12. The routing information selection unit 41 of the routing information receiving means 40 determines based on the receiving 35 interface name of the routing information packet that the routing information is from an IPv4 network and the packet is passed to the IPv4 routing

information processing unit 43 with the receiving interface name.

Step S13. The IPv4 routing information processing unit 43 asks the virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 of the virtual hierarchy management means 30 about hierarchy information assigned to the IPv4 network by the receiving interface name.

Step S14. The virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 returns to the IPv4 routing information processing unit 43 a virtual hierarchy number assigned to the IPv4 network by the virtual hierarchy assigning unit 31.

Step S15. The IPv4 routing information processing unit 43 takes the routing information from the IPv4 network as if it were routing information from an IPv6 network of the hierarchy of the search result of step S14, and writes the routing table in the hierachial routing database unit 61 of the hierachial routing table holding means 60. Furthermore, the IPv4 routing information processing unit 43 writes the routing information, without grouping together by the hierarchy number, in the conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70 with the virtual hierarchy number of the IPv6 network of the search result of step S14.

Through the procedure as above, the routing table is built in the hierachial routing table holding means 60 and the conventional routing table holding means 70 from the routing information received from the IPv4.

Next, the process of routing information reception from the IPv6 network, which the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 20 is a flowchart of an embodiment of the process of the routing information reception from the IPv6 network.

Step S21. The packet receiving unit 10 that is a packet transceiver means of a received routing information packet, passes the packet and a receiving interface name to the routing information receiving means 40.

Step S22. The routing information selection unit 41 of the routing information receiving means 40 determines that the routing information is from the IPv6 network by the receiving interface name of the routing information packet, and transmits the packet to the IPv6 routing information processing unit 42, with the receiving interface name.

Step S23. The IPv6 routing information processing unit 42 collects routing information in the format of the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address from entries of the IPv6 network by virtual hierarchy numbers, and writes a routing table that includes a next relaying point and its transmitting interface by using the hierarchy number as a key into the hierachial routing database unit 61 of the hierachial routing table holding means 60.

Step S24. The IPv6 routing information processing unit 42 further writes routing information indicative of the relaying point and its transmitting interface, with a subnet number of each IPv4 subnet and virtual hierarchy information as keys, without grouping the routing information by virtual hierarchy into the conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70.

Step S25. As to entries other than the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 addresses among the entries of routing information, hierarchy information is collected and the routing table is generated in the conventional routing table

holding means 70 and the hierachial routing table holding means 60.

By the above procedure, a routing table is generated in the hierachial routing table holding 5 means 60 and the conventional routing table holding means 70 from the routing information received from the IPv6.

Next, a process of routing information transmission to the IPv6 network, which the virtual 10 hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 21 is a flowchart of an embodiment of the process of the routing information transmission to the IPv6 network.

Step S31. The timer unit 51 in the routing 15 information transmitting means 50 at a fixed interval provides the transmitting routing information generating unit 52 about adjacent networks to which routing information should be transmitted.

Step S32. When an adjacent network is an 20 IPv6 network, the transmitting routing information generating unit 52 generates the routing information to be transmitted in a procedure that follows from the conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70.

(a) In the case of transmitting routing 30 information to an adjacent network which has a higher hierarchy, such as when NLAID is different, routing information in the conventional routing database unit 71 below the different hierarchy is grouped into one routing information entry. For example, when transmitting the routing information from NLAID=1 to a network of NLAID=2, the routing information on each SLAID belonging to NLAID=1 is 35 not passed, but is grouped into NLAID=1, and treated as one routing information entry.

(b) In the case of transmitting routing

information to an adjacent network of the same hierarchy, an entry of routing information to each of the contents of the conventional routing database unit 71 is generated. In other words, it does not
5 perform grouping of the entries in the database unit.

Step S33. The generated routing information is transmitted to the IPv6 network via the packet transceiver unit 10.

Next, a process of routing information
10 transmission to the IPv4 network, which the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 22 is a flowchart of an embodiment of the process of the routing information transmission to the IPv4 network.

15 Step S41. The timer unit 51 of the routing information transmitting means 50 at a fixed interval provides the transmission routing information generating unit 52 about routing information to be transmitted to an adjacent network.

20 Step S42. In the case that the adjacent network is an IPv4 network, the transmitting routing information generating unit 52 generates transmission routing information in a procedure that follows from the conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70.

(a) When an entry of the conventional routing database unit 71 is a virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address of the IPv6,
30 the routing information is generated by extracting an IPv4 address from the interface ID block of the entry.

(b) When the entry of the conventional routing database unit 71 is other than the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address of the IPv6, the entry will not be included
35 in the routing information, because the IPv4 network

cannot handle the IPv6 routing information.

(c) In order that an IPv4 network may communicate with an IPv6 network, a default router is made entered as the transmitting router. Here,
5 the default router is a router that transmits to a destination address that is not contained in the entry of the routing information. That is, even if a routing entry to an IPv6 network is not contained in the transmitting routing information, communication
10 from an IPv4 network to an IPv6 network is realizable so long that the default router is a router located at the boundary of an IPv6 network.

Step S43. The routing information generated as above is transmitted to the IPv4
15 network via the packet transceiver unit 11.

Next, a process of packet relay from an IPv4 network to an IPv6 network, which the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 23 is a flowchart
20 of an embodiment of the process of the packet relay from the IPv4 network to the IPv6 network.

Step S51. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 receives a packet from the IPv4 network, and passes the packet and a
25 receiving interface name to the packet relay processing means 20.

Step S52. The routing search unit 21 of the packet relay processing means 20 determines that the packet to be relayed is a packet from an IPv4
30 network by the receiving interface name, and asks the conventional routing table holding means 70 about a next relaying router or a host.

Step S53. The conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70 provides the following contents to the routing search unit 21. The contents are (a) an
35 address of a next relaying point or a host, (b)

transmitting interface name, and (c) a hierarchy level of destination address of the packet.

Step S54. The routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed and information obtained at the Step S53 to the packet conversion unit 22.

Step S55. The packet conversion unit 22 asks the virtual hierarchy management means 30 as to the virtual hierarchy of the network to which a transmitting party's IPv4 address belongs.

Step S56. The virtual hierarchy memory unit 32 of the virtual hierarchy management means 30 provides the virtual hierarchy number of the IPv4 network to the packet conversion unit 22.

Step S57. Format conversion is performed on the received IPv4 packet to be converted to an IPv6 packet based on the results of the steps S53 through S56.

Step S58. The format-converted packet is passed to the packet transceiver means 10 with an address of a next relaying router or a host and the transmitting interface name.

Step S59. The packet is sent out to a transmission path from the packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10.

Next, a process of a packet relay from an IPv6 network to an IPv4 network, which the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 24 is a flowchart 30 of an embodiment of the process of the packet relay from the IPv6 network to the IPv4 network.

Step S61. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 receives a packet from the IPv6 network, and passes the packet and a receiving interface name to the packet relay processing means 20.

Step S62. The routing search unit 21 of

the packet relay processing means 20 determines from the receiving interface name that the packet to be relayed is a packet from an IPv6 network, and asks the hierachial routing table holding means 60 as to 5 a router as a next relaying point or a host.

Step S63. The hierachial routing database unit 61 of the hierachial routing table holding means 60 provides the routing search unit 21 that the next relaying point is an IPv4 network.

10 Step S64. The routing search unit 21 asks the conventional routing table holding means 70 as to the next router for relaying or the host.

15 Step S65. The conventional routing database unit 71 of the conventional routing table holding means 70 provides the following contents to the routing search unit 21. The contents are (a) address of the next relaying router or a host, and (b) a transmitting interface name.

20 Step S66. The routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed with the information obtained at step S65 to the packet conversion unit 22.

25 Step S67. Since this is the packet relay from the IPv6 network to the IPv4 network, the packet conversion unit 22 extracts a destination address formed into a hierarchy compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address, and an address contained in the interface ID block of the sender address, and an IPv4 packet is generated.

30 Step S68. The packet generated at step S67 is passed to the packet transceiver means 10 with the transmitting interface name and the address of the next relaying router or a host.

35 Step S69. The packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10 transmits the packet to a transmission path.

Next, a process of packet relay from an

IPv6 network to another IPv6 network, which the virtual hierarchy compliant router of the present invention performs, will be described. Fig. 25 is a flowchart of an embodiment of the process of the 5 packet relay from a first IPv6 network to a second IPv6 network.

Step S71. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 receives a packet from the first IPv6 network, and passes the packet 10 and a receiving interface name to the packet relay processing means 20.

Step S72. The routing search unit 21 of the packet relay processing means 20 determines based on the receiving interface name that a packet 15 to be relayed is a packet from the first IPv6 network, and asks the hierachial routing table holding means 60 about a next relaying router or a host.

Step S73. The hierachial routing database 20 unit 61 of the hierarchy routing table holding means 60 provides the following contents to the routing search unit 21. The contents are (a) address of the next relaying router or the host, and (b) a transmitting interface name.

Step S74. The routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed with information obtained at step S73 to the packet conversion unit 22.

Step S75. Since this is the packet relay 30 from an IPv6 network to another IPv6 network, the packet conversion unit 22 does not process, but passes the packet to be relayed to a packet transceiver means with the transmission interface name and the address of the next relaying router or 35 a host.

Step S76. The packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10 sends out the

packet to a transmission path.

In this embodiment, hierachial routing control can be applied to routing control of an IPv4 network within an IPv6 network, in the case that the 5 IPv6 network is used as a backbone connecting IPv4 networks. Further, the IPv4 network that uses an IPv6 network as a backbone can perform conventional operations, without being aware of the presence of the IPv6 network.

10 Here, a description will follow on a routing information exchange in a network shown in Fig. 26. Fig. 26 is a drawing for explaining routing information exchange in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network 15 where the present invention is applied. In Fig. 26, IPv6 networks of SLAID=2 and SLAID=1 are connected by a router C. In addition, an IPv4 network (address AA.BB.CC.00/24) is connected to the IPv6 network of SLAID=1 through a router B. A user assigns SLAID=3 20 as a hierarchy number to an IPv4 network accommodation interface (B1) of the router B. The address AA.BB.CC.00/24, and an address AA.BB.DD.00/24 are connected via a router A which is a conventional IPv4 router.

25 Further, an IPv4 network (address AA.BB.EE.00/24) is connected to the IPv6 network of SLAID=2 through a router D. A user assigns SLAID=4 as a hierarchy number to an IPv4 accommodation interface (D1) of the router D.

30 The address AA.BB.EE.00/24, and an address AA.BB.FF.00/24 are connected via a router E which is a conventional IPv4 router.

35 Fig. 26 shows how routing information is exchanged between the routers B and D via the router C. Figs. 27 through 29 show a hierachial routing table and a conventional routing table of the routers B, C, and D, respectively. Here, although

routing information is transmitted also in an opposite directions of those described above, an explanation thereof is omitted since there is no technical difference.

- 5 (A) Initialization of the router B
1 1. The virtual hierarchy management means
30 of the router B assigns a virtual hierarchy
SLAID=3 to the interface (B1) to the IPv4 network by
user operation and the like, and stores it in the
10 virtual hierarchy memory unit 32. Furthermore, the
virtual hierarchy management means 30 generates an
"IPv4" entry in the hierachial routing table
holding means 60, which indicates that an IPv6
packet of the virtual hierarchy SLAID=3 terminated
15 at this router shall henceforth be transmitted by
the conventional technique of IPv4, and generates a
"Direct" entry in the conventional routing table
holding means 70, which indicates that the address
AA.BB.CC.00/24 belongs to SLAID=3 and is a network
20 directly accessible from the router B.
2 2. The virtual hierarchy management means
30 generates a "Direct" entry in the conventional
routing table holding means 70 and the hierachial
routing table holding means 60, which indicates that
25 SLAID=1 is a directly accessible network.
3 (B) Receiving routing information and
generating a table in the router B
1 1. As shown by (1) in Fig.26, the packet
receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10
30 of the router B receives IPv4 routing information
from the router A, and passes the packet to the
routing information receiving means 40 with the
receiving interface name (B1).
2 2. Since the interface is an interface
35 with an IPv4 network, the routing information
selection unit 41 of the routing information
receiving means 40 passes the packet and the

receiving interface name (B1) to the IPv4 routing information processing unit 43.

3. The IPv4 routing information processing unit 43 obtains a hierarchy number SLAID=3 assigned 5 to the receiving interface (B1) which accommodates the IPv4 network by querying the virtual hierarchy memory unit 32, and generates an entry of AA.BB.CC.00/24 to the conventional routing table of the router B shown in Fig. 27.

10 (C) Transmitting routing information from the router B

1. The timer unit 51 of the routing information transmitting means 50 of the router B directs the transmitting routing information 15 generating unit 52 to transmit routing information of SLAID=1 and a transmission interface (B2) to the network.

2. The transmitting routing information generating unit 52 generates routing information for 20 entries of networks other than with the transmitting interface B2 among the entries in the conventional routing table holding means 70 of the router B. At this time, each entry of IPv4 is formed into an IPv6 address by virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible 25 IPv6 address format.

3. As shown by (2) in Fig. 26, the generated routing information is transmitted to the network of SLAID=1 via the packet transceiver unit 10.

30 (D) Receiving routing information and generating a table in the router C

1. The router C is a router that is directly connected to networks of SLAID=1 and 2, therefore, similar to the initial setting of the 35 router B, it has a "Direct" entry in the hierachial routing table and the conventional routing table for SLAID=1 and 2, respectively.

2. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 of the router C receives routing information from the router B, and passes the packet and a receiving interface name (C1) to the routing information receiving means 40.

5 3. Since the interface is an interface with an IPv6 network, the routing information selection unit 41 of the routing information receiving means 40 passes the packet and the 10 receiving interface name (C1) to the IPv6 routing information processing unit 42.

10 4. The IPv6 routing information processing unit 42 determines whether received information is routing information in format of the virtualization 15 compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address, or routing information in the form of an IPv6 address. Here, since either (SLAID=3, interface ID=AA.BB.CC.00/24, or SLAID=3, interface ID=AA.BB.DD.00/24) is in the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 20 address format, one entry of the hierarchy number (SLAID=3) is generated into the hierachial routing table holding means 60, and each entry is generated into the conventional routing table holding means 70, as shown by dotted areas in Fig. 28.

25 (E) Transmitting routing information in the router C

1. The timer unit 51 of the routing information transmitting means 50 of the router C directs the transmitting routing information 30 generating unit 52 to transmit the routing information to a network of SLAID=2 and a transmitting interface (C2).

35 2. The transmitting routing information generating unit 52 generates routing information for entries of networks that do not bear the transmitting interface C2 among the entries in the conventional routing table information holding means

70 of the router C.

3. The generated routing information is transmitted to the network of SLAID=2 via the packet transceiver unit 10, as shown by (3) in Fig. 26.

5 (F) Initialization of the router D

1. The virtual hierarchy management means 30 of the router D assigns virtual hierarchy SLAID=4 to an interface (D1) to an IPv4 network by user operation and the like, which is stored in the 10 virtual hierarchy memory unit 32. Furthermore, the virtual hierarchy management means 30 generates an "IPv4" entry into the hierachial routing table holding means 60, which indicates that an IPv6 packet having a virtual hierarchy SLAID=4 in the 15 address is terminated at this router and will be henceforth transmitted by the conventional IPv4 technique, and a "Direct" entry into the conventional routing table holding means 70, which indicates that an address AA.BB.EE.00/24 belongs to 20 SLAID=4, and is a network directly accessible from the router D.

2. The virtual hierarchy management means 30 generates a "Direct" entry into the conventional routing table holding means 70 and the hierachial routing table holding means 60, which indicates that 25 that SLAID=2 is a network that is directly accessible.

(G) Receiving routing information and generating table in the router D

30 1. As shown by (3) in Fig. 26, the packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 of the router D receives routing information on IPv4 from the router C, and passes the packet to the routing information receiving means 40 with a 35 receiving interface name (D2).

2. Since the interface is an interface with an IPv6 network, the routing information

selection unit 41 of the routing information receiving means 40 passes the packet and the receiving interface name (D2) to the IPv6 routing information processing unit 42.

- 5 3. The IPv6 routing information processing unit 42 determines whether each entry of the routing information received is the routing information in a virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address format, or the routing information in the
10 format of an IPv6 address. Since the routing information (SLAID=3, interface ID=AA.BB.CC.00/24, and SLAID=3, interface ID=AA.BB.DD.00/24) is in the format of the virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address, one entry of the
15 hierachial number (SLAID=3) is generated into the hierachial routing table holding means 60, and an entry is generated by the conventional routing table holding means 70 to each. Furthermore, as a dotted area in Fig. 29 shows, routing information on
20 (SLAID=1, Interface ID=0) is entered into each of the hierachial routing table holding means 60 and the conventional routing table holding means 70.
 (H) Transmitting routing information in the router D
25 1. The timer unit 51 of the routing information transmitting means 50 of the router D directs the transmitting routing information generating unit 52 to transmit routing information to an address AA.BB.EE.00/24 (transmitting interface
30 D1).
 2. The transmitting routing information generating unit 52 generates routing information that designates the router D as a default router for a network entry other than the transmitting
35 interface being D1 among the entries of the conventional routing table information holding means 70 of the router D.

3. As shown by (4) in Fig. 26, the generated routing information is transmitted to the address AA.BB.EE.00/24 via the packet transceiver unit 10.

5 4. A router E, upon receiving this routing information packet, generates its routing table with a conventional IPv4 routing information processing procedure.

10 Next, packet relay in a network shown in Fig. 30 will be described. Fig. 30 is a drawing for explaining the packet relay in a mixed environment of a hierachial network and a non-hierachial network where the present invention is applied. In Fig. 30, IPv6 networks of SLAID=1 and SLAID=2 are
15 connected via the router C, similarly to Fig. 26. Further, an IPv4 network (address AA.BB.CC.00/24) is connected to the IPv6 network of SLAID=1 through the router B. A user assigns SLAID=3 as a hierarchy number to the IPv4 accommodation interface (B1) of
20 the router B. The address AA.BB.CC.00/24, and the address AA.BB.DD.00/24 are connected by the router A which is a conventional IPv4 router.

Moreover, the IPv4 network (address AA.BB.EE.00/24) is connected to the IPv6 network of SLAID=2 through the router D. A user assigns SLAID=4 as a hierarchy number to the IPv4 network accommodation interface (D1) of the router D. The address AA.BB.EE.00/24, and an address AA.BB.FF.00/24 are connected by the router E which
25 is a conventional IPv4 router.

30 Fig. 30 shows how a packet is transmitted from a Node A (AA.BB.EE.01) to a Node B (AA.BB.CC.01). Figs. 31 through 33 show the hierachial routing table and the conventional routing table of the routers D, C, and B, at this event, respectively.

35 (A) Packet transmitting of the Node A

1. As shown by (1) in Fig. 30, the Node A transmits a packet addressed to AA.BB.CC.01 to the router D with the conventional packet transmitting procedure of IPv4.

5 (B) Packet relaying of the router D

10 1. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 of the router D receives the packet from the Node A, and passes the packet and a receiving interface name (D1) to the routing search unit 21 of the packet relay processing means 20.

15 2. Because the receiving interface (D1) is an interface that accommodates an IPv4 network, the routing search unit 21 searches the conventional routing table holding means 70 to find a match as indicated by a dotted area of the routing table of the router D as shown in Fig. 31, obtaining the following information: that a hierarchy of destination address is SLAID=3, that a next relaying 20 router is the router C, and that an interface to the router C should be D2.

25 3. Since the interface D2 is on an IPv6 network, the packet to be relayed will be converted from IPv4 to IPv6, for which the routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed to the packet conversion unit 22 with a search result of the conventional routing table holding means 70.

30 4. The packet conversion means 22 converts sender's address (AA.BB.EE.01) and receiver's address (AA.BB.CC.01) of the packet into a virtualization compliant IPv4 compatible IPv6 address format, and packetizes the IPv4 packet into an IPv6 packet.

35 5. The packet conversion means 22 provides the next relaying point (router C) and the interface name (D2), and passes the converted packet to the packet transceiver means 10.

6. As shown by (2) in Fig. 30, the packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10 relays the packet to be relayed to the next relaying point (router C).

5 (C) Packet relay of the router C

1. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 of the router C receives the packet from the router D. Since this packet is a packet which must be relayed, the packet and a receiving interface name (C2) are passed to the routing search unit 21 of the packet relay processing means 20.

15 2. Because the receiving interface (C2) is an interface that accommodates an IPv6 network, the routing search unit 21 searches the hierachial routing table holding means 60 to find a match as indicated by a dotted area of the routing table of the router C, as shown in Fig. 32, obtaining the following information: that a next relaying router 20 is the router B and an interface to the router B should be C1.

With this hierachial routing search, the present invention realizes the hierarchical routing search even in relaying a packet between IPv4 networks by the hierachial routing table holding means 60 at the router B.

25 3. While the routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed to the packet conversion unit 22 with the search result of the hierachial routing table holding means 60, the packet conversion unit 22 does not perform conversion processing because it is a packet to be relayed from IPv6 network to IPv6 network.

30 4. The routing search unit 21 provides a next relaying point (router B) and transmitting interface name (C1), and passes the converted packet to the packet transceiver means 10.

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5. As shown by (3) in Fig. 30, the packet transmitting unit 12 of the packet transceiver means 10 relays the packet to be relayed to the next relaying point (router B).

5 (D) Packet relay of the router B

1. The packet receiving unit 11 of the packet transceiver means 10 of the router B receives the packet from the router C, and passes the packet and a receiving interface name (B2) to the routing search unit 21 of the packet relay processing means 20.

15 2. Because the receiving interface (B2) is an interface that accommodates an IPv4 network, the routing search unit 21 searches the conventional routing table holding means 70 to find a match as indicated by a dotted area on the left-hand side of the routing table of the router B of Fig. 33, obtaining a result that the next transmission destination is an IPv4 network.

20 3. As for the IPv4 network, the routing search unit 21 searches the conventional routing table holding means 70, finding a match at the dotted area on the right-hand side of the routing table of the router B of Fig. 33, and obtains the following information: that a destination node is a node belonging to the network of an address AA.BB.CC.00/24 that is subordinate to the router, and that an interface should be B1.

30 4. Since the destination network of the transmission is an IPv4 network, packet conversion of the packet to be relayed will be performed from IPv6 to IPv4, for which the routing search unit 21 passes the packet to be relayed to the packet conversion unit 22 with the search result of the conventional routing table holding means 70.

35 5. The packet conversion means 22 extracts an interface ID from sender's address (SLAID=3,

interface ID=AA.BB.EE.01) and receiver's address (SLAID=4, interface ID=AA.BB.CC.01) of the packet, assigns them as IPv4 addresses of the sender and the receiver, respectively, and converts the IPv6 packet
5 into an IPv4 packet.

6. The packet conversion means 22 provides the interface name (B1) and that the next relaying point is the node itself (determined by Direct) to the packet transceiver means 10, and passes the
10 converted packet.

7. As shown by (4) in Fig. 30, the packet transceiver means 10 transmits the packet to be relayed by the conventional transmitting technique to the transmission destination (node B).

15 In this manner, communication between IPv4 networks over an IPv6 network can be realized, employing the routing search that uses the hierarchy number in the IPv6 network, by

assigning the IPv4 networks virtual
20 hierarchy numbers equivalent to the hierarchy number in the IPv6 network,

attaching the virtual hierarchy number to a packet to be relayed at a router located at an entrance from a first IPv4 network to the IPv6
25 network when packet relay between the IPv4 networks over the IPv6 network is performed,

performing hierarchical routing control by the virtual hierarchy numbers within the IPv6 network, and

30 removing the virtual hierarchy numbers from the packet to be relayed at a second router located at an exit from the IPv6 network to a second IPv4 network.

Moreover, the conventional packet relay
35 defined by the IPv6 network and handling of the virtual hierarchy information in routing information transmission are facilitated by accommodating the

IPv4 network address in the interface identification information block of the IPv6 network address format, and by accommodating the virtual hierarchy number in the IPv6 information block of the IPv6 network
5 address format for the conventional packet relay and the routing information transmission defined by the IPv6 network.

In this manner, in an IPv4 network that uses an IPv6 network as a backbone, the IPv4 network
10 can perform operations as usual, without being aware of presence of the IPv6 network as a backbone, and can enjoy the high-speed routing search within the IPv6 network, using the IPv6 routing table for routing to an IPv4 network, thus outstandingly
15 contributing to structuring an IPv6 network.

In addition, the packet conversion unit 22 corresponds to a virtual hierarchy number assigning means and a virtual hierarchy number removing means given in a claim, and the routing search unit 21
20 corresponds to a routing control means, an IPv6 routing search means, and a conventional routing search means, and a identification means.